

## MUST CATHOLICS ACCEPT THE SYLLABUS?\*

By JAMES J. MURPHY

**O**F VITAL IMPORTANCE is a proper understanding of the degree of authority employed by the Catholic church to enforce its teaching respecting its claims to control the conduct of civil affairs. That teaching is embodied in a most succinct way in what is known as "The Syllabus of Errors of Pope Pius IX", appended to his most reactionary encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, of 1864 when liberal, democratic principles in state and church were hopefully taking root in Europe. The present destruction of democracy there by the forces of world Fascism is in line with the traditional demands of the Catholic church as dogmatized into modern Catholic teaching by this Syllabus of Errors of Pius IX. It is therefore necessary to be aware of the effect that this same Catholic teaching may have in the crisis also facing us in this country from the growing threat of world Fascism in the Western Hemisphere.

When the Syllabus of Errors was first promulgated, it was at once clear to the casual reader, untainted by casuistry, that it contained an infallible declaration of doctrines to be held as matters of faith throughout the Catholic church. *Curia* and Jesuit theologians confirmed its infallibility. Only a minority of liberal theologians living outside Italy ventured to even question how it was defined.

\* For the initial installment of the official Catholic text of "The Syllabus of Errors" and its explanation, see the article that follows.

Many years later, however, when its frank confession of doctrines appeared increasingly indiscreet, Catholic apologists began to soft-pedal its importance and infallibility. With their well-practised sleight-of-hand they started to stress the escape clauses of the Syllabus until they had convinced the outside world that it was not an infallible, irrevocable declaration of Catholic dogma but only the private opinion of Pius IX, which they whisperingly admitted was exaggerated and outmoded.

This masterpiece of camouflage would not have succeeded had not the way been paved by two previous misrepresentations: First, the world outside the Catholic church had already been convinced that a papal declaration of doctrine was not infallible unless it was an *ex cathedra* pronouncement. Secondly, the non-Catholic world has been persuaded that the only doctrines that Catholics are obliged to believe as matters of faith are those that have been defined either by an Ecumenical Council or by an infallible pronouncement of a pope.

While each of the two basic misrepresentations just mentioned needs to be refuted, this article will concentrate chiefly on the first of them, inasmuch as it relates more directly to the present question of the infallibility of the Syllabus.

The *Syllabus Errorum* (Syllabus or Catalogue of Errors) published by Pius IX was not a new declaration of doctrines. It was meant to be a solemn, official promulgation to the universal

since each of the documents [*Quanta Cura* and *The Syllabus*] have been confirmed by the universal authority of the Church, this fact makes both documents certain and infallible doctrines of faith."<sup>4</sup>

Not only was the Syllabus accepted and promulgated as official church doctrine by all the bishops of the church, but it was also formally approved in Rome by three hundred bishops from various countries, previous to its publication: "In 1862 when the [Pontifical] Commission had completed the work ordered by Pius IX and submitted a list of sixty-one propositions . . . they were submitted to the examination of three hundred bishops gathered together in Rome who, by a large majority, approved of their condemnation."<sup>5</sup>

In ending its long article on the infallibility of the Syllabus with its detailed discussion of many slightly varying opinions, the *Dictionnaire Apologétique* gives its own highly authoritative conclusion:

"In short, even if it could not be said with absolute certitude that the Syllabus is an *ex cathedra* definition or even that its every particular is guaranteed by the infallibility of the Church, one still has to admit that, without the shadow of a doubt, it is an act of the Sovereign Pontiff, a doctrinal decision of the Pope, authoritatively binding throughout the whole Church, which consequently all the Faithful must respect and obey. 'Rome has spoken, the case is settled'. Such is the rule and practice of all true Catholics."<sup>6</sup>

So much for the Syllabus of Errors as such and the fact that all Catholics are bound to accept and believe what it teaches. One additional and more generic point remains to be proved: that the pope does not need to "infallibly de-

fine" a doctrine but merely to teach it in the course of his ordinary teaching duties as sovereign pontiff of the church in order to transform it into a doctrine of faith to be believed by all Catholics. On this point the *Dictionnaire Apologétique* states: "The Pope, as a matter of fact, can impose his will on the whole Church without having to bother each time to use his sovereign power to its utmost degree, that is, by using his charisma of infallibility. A point of doctrine can be imposed under strict obligation, binding on the entire Church, without its being absolutely infallible and the Faithful are bound in conscience to submit to it exteriorly and interiorly" (i.e., not only by not publicly opposing it but also by positively accepting and believing it in the innermost heart, soul and mind).<sup>7</sup> Papal teachings in encyclicals such as the *Casti Connubii* of the late Pope Pius XI in 1931, against birth control, are binding on Catholics under pain of eternal damnation.

Speaking on this same subject, the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*<sup>8</sup> has the following:

"Leo XIII in his encyclical *Immortale Dei* says: 'Whatever the Roman Pontiffs have handed down or will later hand down is to be held with unwavering belief and publicly professed as often as circumstances demand'. This is something that needs particularly to be observed in the questions of modern liberties, in which 'one must cling fast to the decision of the Apostolic See and think as the See thinks'. Such orders [as of Leo XIII] demand, beyond question, assent and adherence of mind even if they are not infallibly defined."

Cardinal Lépicier, former professor of dogma in the Roman College of Propaganda and later ranking theologian of the Curia up to his recent death, de-

<sup>4</sup> P. Frins, *Kirchlexicon*, voc. *Syllabus*, col. 1021.

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*, Vol. IV, col. 1572.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.* col. 1577.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, col. 1576. This is not a mere theological opinion but the formal and official stand of the authoritative *Dictionnaire Apologétique* itself.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. VII (2), col. 1711.

clares with full Vatican approval: "Therefore there can be no doubt in anyone's mind but that papal teachings contained in encyclical letters are matters of faith fully as much as more solemn definitions."<sup>9</sup>

Catholic apologists may continue to distort and camouflage the embarrassing doctrines of the Syllabus to suit the occasion; the fact remains, however, that they are taught today in all Catholic seminaries and must be believed as matters of faith and put into practice

<sup>9</sup> *De Stabilitate et Progressu Dogmatis*, p. 39.

by all Catholics, regardless of whether or not Pius IX fully intended his Syllabus to be accepted as an *ex cathedra* declaration.

While the idea of an infallible man is in itself ridiculous in this day and age, it becomes even more so when, after he unburdens himself of a solemn declaration to the entire world, neither he nor any one else knows whether he has used his infallible teaching power or not. More ludicrous still is the fact that you are supposed to believe what he said anyway, under threat of eternal damnation, whether he did use it or not.

## EXORCISM



BLESSING OF DOGS

CATHOLIC ritual has blessings and exorcisms for everything, from airplanes to bathrooms. In the above picture a priest, the Rev. Bernard Whelan, is seen officiating at a blessing for dogs in the Church of St. Thomas

More, St. John's Wood, England, where more than 100 pets were brought for the ceremony.

It is the belief of the Catholic church that all material things are possessed by the devil who can be exorcized only by a priestly ceremony. The human infant after birth is included in this category, and an elaborate ritual is prescribed at baptism by which the devil and his evil influences are cast out of the child. This is believed accomplished by signs of the cross, spittle from the priest's mouth, salt (itself previously exorcized) placed in the mouth of the child, oil spread on the child's breast and back of its neck, etc., and the priest's direct command to Satan: "Depart, thou accursed devil from this servant of God!" Yet, in the common opinion of all men, there is nothing more innocent, angelic and even Godlike than a new-born babe!

## PROPAGANDA BLITZKRIEG

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